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COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

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The Germans were the earliest to institute a system of general education, and the wonderful progress of Germany in every respect is now largely attributed to the thoroughness of such national education. The fact that in Germany elementary education has been generally compulsory and to a large extent also gratuitous, for more than one hundred and fifty years, is recognized to be an essential element in recent political, industrial and commercial successes of the nation.

France offers a good illustration of the rapidity with which illiteracy may be reduced as a result of good attendance laws. In 1854, no less than 42.5 per cent. of the French people were illiterate. In 1870, at the end of the Empire, 31 per cent. were illiterate, and in 1880 the condition was very little improved. In 1882, the compulsory education act went into effect and as a result, in 1900, the illiteracy had been reduced to 6 per cent.—only one-fifth of what it was eighteen years before.

As showing the relation of the compulsory school system in Germany and other European states to illiteracy, the following statistics of adults are suggestive: German Empire, .05 per cent. are illiterate; Denmark, .02; Finland, .49; Switzerland, .13; Scotland, 2.46; Netherlands, 2.30; England, 3.00; France, 4.70; Belgium (not compulsory), 10.10; Austria, 35.60; Ireland, 7.90; Hungary, 47.80; Greece, 30.00; Italy, 32.99; Portugal, 79.20; Spain, 68.10; Russia, 61.70; Servia, 79.30; Roumania, 88.40.

The right of state authorities to require the attendance of all children at school was asserted early in the American colonies. Connecticut may claim to have been one of the first states in the world that established the principle. Its code of laws adopted in 1650 contained stringent provisions for compulsory attendance upon schools. In 1810, with the changed conditions resulting from immigration, it was found impossible to enforce the law without important additions, amounting in reality to a set of factory laws, forbidding the

employment of children under fourteen years of age who have not attended school for at least three months in the year.

Compulsory educational laws have not been adopted in any of the Southern states except Kentucky and Missouri. Four counties in Tennessee, through legislative enactment, have such laws, but no fair test has yet been given. In Asheville, North Carolina, by popular vote an ordinance was adopted requiring compulsory education. That state has a local option law for cities as to compulsory education. In the South great progress has been made in public education, especially during the past twenty years, despite the fact that this section remains, of all the Union, the only section where attendance on public schools between the ages of six and fourteen for a considerable period each year is not compulsory. But how necessary is an even greater effort to secure universal elementary education in the South is shown in the fact that in 1900, 27.9 per cent of all the illiterate white voters in the United States were in the South, while only 14.9 per cent of the white voters of the country were found here. In other words, we had nearly twice the illiterate population among the whites of voting age than our proportion of population justified.

Decrease of Illiteracy

I have no disposition to minimize the progress made in the South in reducing illiteracy. The record, in fact, is encouraging. In the South Atlantic division, for the entire population, white and black, ten years and over, the percentage of illiterates was reduced from 40.3 per cent in 1870 to 23.9 per cent in 1900, or nearly one-half, while in the South Central Division the reduction was even more marked, the percentages being 44.5 per cent in 1870 and 22.9 per cent in 1900. During these thirty years the percentage of illiteracy in the whole United States was being reduced from 20 in 1870 to 10.7 in 1900. The proportionate reductions were thus larger in the South, by a good deal, than in the North Atlantic states, though slightly less than in the Central and Western.

Considering the white population alone, the percentage of illiterates in the South Atlantic division in 1870 was 23.5, and this had been reduced to 11.5 per cent in 1900. In the South Central states the percentages were 23.4 in 1870 and 11.8 per cent in 1900. For the United States the percentages were 11.5 in 1870 and 6.2 in 1900.

The South, despite the reductions made, is still in point of average literacy behind all the other sections of the Union, and far behind such countries of Europe as the German Empire, Switzerland, Scotland, Netherlands, England, France, Belgium, Ireland. Only Austria, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Russia Servia and Roumania of European countries make a worse showing.

Twenty out of the thirty-three counties of Tennessee have in the male whites, able to vote, over 20 per cent illiterate—an aggregate of 13,450. In one of the three grand divisions of the state, there are, I estimate, about 20,000 white illiterates of voting age. In fact, despite the decrease in the percentage of illiterates in the past three decades, the actual number of white illiterates of voting age had actually increased from 37,713 in 1870 to 52,418 in 1900. Tennessee is by no means alone in this condition. In mountain sections of all the South the conditions are most serious, but the white illiteracy is by no means confined to these districts.

Do not understand me to assert that these illiterates are not in many ways educated. They are shrewd, observant people. They are industrious and thrifty. Their intelligence in many respects is large. They are of the best Anglo-Saxon stock and in different environment make rapid progress. Yet, unequipped with ability to read and write, deprived of the illumination of the written word, out of touch with the progress of the world, what a tremendous obstacle must they overcome! Consider what the economic, political and social uplift of a state would be if this population were by reading able to improve itself. In 1906, a candidate for Governor of Tennessee, or Georgia, on an illiteracy platform, receiving the united support of all the illiterates, white and black, would not have been the third man in the contest.

Attendance vs. Enrollment

The fault in our school system seems to lie not only in the failure to secure the enrollment of the child, but more especially in the failure to secure his attendance after enrollment. The scholastic population in Tennessee, with which state I am familiar, was about 772,000 in 1905. There were 507,000 enrolled, 537,000 including private schools, but the average attendance in public schools was only 348,000. When we remember that the average school year in Tennessee is only 116 days, and that less than half

the school children are in school even half that short period during the year, we may appreciate why this condition is present. On its face, the enrollment is creditable, but the irregular attendance and short terms of school make it impossible to cope with the mountain of ignorance to be cut down which needs heroic efforts.

If Germany, with less than one-half of one per cent. of population illiterate, requires a ten months' school course for all pupils from six to fourteen years of age, how will a Southern state reduce its illiteracy to the same degree, with a 116-day course, and one-half the pupils in school?

It has been asked regarding Tennessee, which is typical, "If 242,498 children were not enrolled in the public schools in 1895, and 265,471 were not enrolled in the public schools in 1905, how long will it be until all who are eligible are enrolled?" and "If 382,293 were not in average attendance in 1895 and 424,206 were not in average attendance ten years later, and the per cent. of such attendance is now 68.7, how long until the per cent. of average daily attendance will begin to show an increase?" It may also be asked "If there were more illiterate voters in 1900 than in 1870, when will there be none?"

The campaign for education in the South has accomplished much. Tennessee, for example, is spending nearly \$3,400,000 a year on its public schools. This is not quite \$5 per capita of scholastic population, but it is a considerable increase. Yet many states spend \$15 to \$20 per capita.

In general, it may be said that the school terms have been lengthened, the teachers paid better salaries, better buildings and equipment furnished. But does this suffice? Are not even more heroic remedies needed for a condition manifestly so dangerous?

The matter of the present bad attendance is shown in the reports for Knox County and Knoxville. The scholastic population of Knox County for the year 1905-06 was 28,204. Of this number 10,682 belonged to the City of Knoxville, and 17,522 to the rural districts. The enrollment for the city was 5,833 and for the rural districts 12,225. It will thus be seen that the percentage of enrollment was 54.6 in the city, and 70 outside the city. The average attendance of all the scholastic population was 43 per cent in the city and 42 per cent in the country districts. The schools in the city were open 179 days, and those in the country 157

days. The enrollment was good, but owing to lax interest of parents, only forty-three out of every hundred children of school age in the city attended, and less in the country.

To show how the attendance drops off year by year, take the Knoxville schools by grades. Nor is the showing in that city exceptional. In the First grade there were 1,797 pupils; Second, 775; Third, 811; Fourth, 694; Fifth, 504; Sixth, 461; Seventh, 291; Eighth, 261; Ninth, 150; Tenth, 89. Look at the little army of nearly 1,800 diminishing to one-seventh its number before the high school is reached. How many reach the university? How many any technical school? Less than 5 per cent. of our boys and girls acquire an education which we would consider an average common school education.

If the children in school were kept in school for a period long enough to acquire an average elementary education, and thus be equipped with a training which would enable them to pursue their own self-education, the aspect of the situation would not be gloomy and we might ignore these unpleasant statistics of illiteracy. Technical illiteracy would not be alarming, if it did not indicate a condition which nearly always accompanies it. How can we compete with a country like Germany when only one-twentieth of the scholastic population, even of our average cities, has acquired an education equal to that which the entire youth of Germany receives? Furthermore, how shall we compete in industry, commerce and agriculture, when so small a proportion of our population receives technical instruction, while in the Kingdom of Prussia alone there were 2,989 technical or continuation schools, which were attended by 219,492 pupils?

It is, of course, better for the child to secure even two or three years' rudimentary training than none at all, but certainly it is wrong for the state to allow the unworthy parent to permit the child to leave school with such a small equipment for life's battle.

Illiteracy a Public Loss

How little, comparatively, we spend on education, despite our great advance of late, may be gathered from the fact that if the average teacher in Tennessee worked the average number of days at the average salary he would earn only \$158.40 a year. Con-

sidering the remuneration, it is truly astonishing that so many devoted and painstaking teachers are obtained for the work; but, of course, on the average the instruction must be inefficient.

I am free to admit that while compulsory education is an ideal condition difficult to be realized, and that a further development of public sentiment in favor of universal education must precede it, just as every reform, moral, social or political, must come as a result of general conviction; nevertheless, our efforts seem futile unless we arouse the states to such an extent that by a mighty effort, under a compulsory system, supported by the intelligent people of the South, the illiterate population not of an age beyond the reach of the schools shall be brought under instruction.

In some quarters, where there is a large negro population, the cost of compulsory education is urged as an objection. But it would seem that as the negro is to be here, he ought to have the right sort of training. It is probable that results up to this time have not repaid the amounts spent, but this is no doubt due to the nature of the education. The negro child, like the white child, needs not only the technical instruction in letters, but more, he needs the discipline and character-forming influences of the schools. In my opinion, the greatest mistake ever made by the South was when it turned the instruction of the negro in churches and in schools over to his own race. The race is in the position of the man trying to raise himself by his own bootstraps.

The inability of the South to spare as much money per capita for education as easily as the North, is very apparent, but inasmuch as the need here is so much greater, the question presents a different aspect. *Should expenditures for education be based on proportionate wealth or on proportionate need?*

Indeed, the figures of wealth, while they do offer some excuse against heavy taxes for schools, also ought to suggest a more important deduction. Let us ask ourselves, if the South had had universal education since 1870, would not the great losses caused by the Civil War have been the sooner repaired, and would not our section, in the wealth of its people, now stand a better comparison with other sections?

Though the South is still behind, the wealth is certainly sufficient for educational needs. The value of property in Tennessee

increased from \$498,000,000 in 1870 to \$1,400,000,000 in 1900. The day when any state of the South was unable to tax itself for schools for both races to accommodate all the scholastic population has passed. With a per capita wealth of \$620, Tennessee ought to spend more than \$1.50 per capita on its schools.

In Germany the tremendous stimulus of general education has caused that country to forge ahead of other European nations whose natural resources are greater than Germany's. To overcome the advantage of wealth which the North and West possess over the South, no policy would be complete without the institution of a more general and more thorough system of education of the masses, as the first requisite. To secure such general instruction compulsion must be considered.

The State's Right to Self-Protection

Argument is made that compulsory education is monarchical. It can hardly be so called, since it had its origin in this country. A second argument has been advanced against it, that it enlarges the powers of government. Even if the American precedent could not be quoted, the right to compel attendance at school might, in a republic, be defended under the general head of self-protection, along with quarantine and hygienic regulations. It has also been urged that it interferes with the liberty of parents. No more than laws punishing the parent for the abuses of the child, or for depriving it of necessaries which he is able to prepare for it. In compelling the parent to send the child to school, the state does no more than to secure to the child his right. Often the objection is heard that it deprives the parent of the labor of a child, and that in some cases the parent cannot afford this, or give the child decent clothes, or pay for school books. This, in nearly all communities where compulsory education prevails, is looked after by the state. The community can much better afford to pay for clothing and books than let the child grow up in ignorance.

The state taxes all classes for the support of the public schools, whether they have children to send or not. The state owes it to these taxpayers to see that the taxes collected shall be used for the purpose for which they are levied. This is impossible unless it com-

pels the attendance of all children at school. The taxpayer then, has a right to insist on a general law, on the ground that it is necessary in order to enable the state to perform its obligation to him. But, it may as well be admitted, that something more than the passage of a compulsory educational law is necessary to secure general education. In several countries, and in some of our states, such laws have not proved more effective than voluntary education. Certainly it is essential that by a system of factory laws the opportunity of the child to attend schools must be made, and in addition there must be such a general desire for education and pride in its possession in the community as to induce a general acquiescence and co-operation in the enforcement of the law. In addition, the schools themselves must offer the best advantages. Prussia, the classic land of compulsion, provides in its school laws for an abundance of school-rooms, well-equipped school-houses, and a high grade of teachers, and her compulsory system is successful. In Turkey, Greece and Portugal, where these essentials and the education-loving population are lacking, the laws are not so successful.

The state must be protected against the dragging-down influence of the ignorant. Statistics show that the ignorant commit many more crimes in proportion to their numbers than the educated. Many more such are dependents. It is a burden on the state to prosecute crime and to maintain jails and almshouses. Vice and idleness weaken the community. A parent who permits a child to grow up in ignorance is committing an offense not only against the child but against the state.

Every consideration of the welfare of society, of good government, of the advancement of civilization, demands general elementary education, and as a corollary, more general higher education. But there will never be any material growth in educational progress until the root of the system is nourished.

Experience has shown that, while some ignorant men win success, the mass sinks into the ranks of those who do not know whence the next day's bread is coming. Countries with the highest average of education are certainly marked for the greatest progress to-day. Great as it is, our own growth in wealth does not nearly equal theirs.

The Supreme Need of the South

The economic progress of the South, the development of its splendid mineral and agricultural resources, depends more than all else on the general education of its people, and I do not exclude the negro population, though their education should be of a different character, as suited to a race which can for centuries do only the simpler labor of our section. Education must be not only such as to remove the stigma of illiteracy, but it must be adapted to promote the greatest efficiency of each race. Only one acre of cotton lands in ten in the South is cultivated. Not one-hundredth proportion of our mineral lands is exploited. We do not manufacture anything like what we consume of manufactured goods. The story of the South is of the future not of the past.

Some object to the word "compulsory." It is probably ill-chosen, but the man of intelligence is not disturbed by a word. At present we have schools controlled under the law, but the attendance is voluntary. The establishment of public schools is so universal that it has by custom become in a sense compulsory. There is no objection now expressed to the taxation of property for public school purposes. Such objections were heard years ago, but no longer. If the state is embarked in the business of educating youth, why not pass also an attendance law, so as to make the education the most general and effective? I have no patience with the spirit which opposes such regulation on the ground that it interferes with liberty. Every law does this more or less. Civilized society institutes government and government must control the individual, not only in the interest of other individuals, but in his own interest as well. Every law is compulsory.

The question you have met here to consider is bound with that of education. As the mill doors close on the child, the school doors should open. The same humanitarian spirit which would protect the boy or girl from the destructive influences of labor at an immature age, should be directed to securing the attendance of that child at school. If the child is turned out of the mills to mere idleness and vice, no good is accomplished. The state which denies to a parent the power to profit by the labor of a child too young to resist, ought to force that parent to give the child an opportunity to acquire an education. The ignorance, vice and crime of the

untutored child are on the heads, not only of the parent, but of every citizen who permits this shameful treatment of a ward of society.

Society's interest demands that the youth of the land shall be trained to become as adults integral parts of the great machinery of production, and healthy and intelligent American citizens. If by any neglect society permits them to become criminals and dependents, society alone is to blame.

Progress, I am glad to say, is being made in this movement. At a great conference attended by representatives of the factories and their employees at Nashville last year, resolutions were unanimously adopted favoring compulsory school attendance. Capital and labor here agree.

I have cited the conditions. I am a Southern man and I have pride in what has been done by my section, but I would not, out of pride, endeavor to deny that we need tenfold more zeal in application to these problems.

As I have said, I do not know that compulsory education is immediately practicable, but I firmly believe that it ought to be the end toward which during the next few years, we shall work; and when some Horace Mann or Thomas Jefferson arouses the people of the Southern states to their duty, there need be no longer any doubt of the splendid future of the South.